

NewsRoom

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Section: COMMENTARY

Choking on the 'greenies' diet

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When was the last time you hugged a tree? If you don't remember, you obviously haven't been on a college campus recently.

Since the first Earth Day in 1970, campus "greenies" have tried their best to raise eco-awareness. From carrying trash to eating it, environmentalists make their point in strange ways.

As a senior at Yale, I finally have resigned myself to sorting my newspapers, aluminum cans and plastic containers - not because the greenies have convinced me this will save the environment, but because recycling is university policy (not to mention Connecticut state law). In addition to sorting and recycling, I even accept environmental crusaders rummaging through my trash in search of "misplaced" recyclables, which are then used to rate my hall on an eco-scale of 1 through 10. But as compliant as I am, some environmental activities are just too much.

Late one night, I was in the student lounge at the Yale library sipping my Diet Coke and studying. Suddenly, 30 half-naked eco-warriors stormed in. They were covered with mud, camouflage paint, leaves and branches. They didn't "say" anything. Instead, they rushed around the tables imitating rain and tropical animals and birds. One "monkey" jumped on my table; a winged woman screeched in my ear. I sat there holding back my laughter, lest any of these unwashed animals come any closer.

I have found that many student environmentalists will raise awareness at incredible costs to their bodies and dignity. For example, when I was younger, my parents encouraged me to eat everything on my plate since children in Ethiopia were starving. My parents didn't mean it literally, of course. At Reed College, a small liberal arts school in Portland, Ore., students have taken this advice to the extreme. A prospective student visiting Reed told me about his experience eating in the school's cafeteria. When he went to return his tray, a group of eco-scroungers grabbed his scraps and made it their dinner. These greenies had made the environmentally correct decision to eat only food that was headed for the garbage pail. Noble? Maybe. Disgusting? Definitely.

Other students want people to know just how much trash we, as a wasteful consumer society, produce daily. One weekend, hundreds of Yale students carried around all of their trash in transparent plastic bags. This included all food and paper and excluded only bodily waste. At James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va., students sat outside their student union at lunch time in huge piles of trash to protest solid waste disposal.

College administrators also want to get into the act. For example, Tufts University, near Boston, has begun an Environmental Literacy Institute (ELI), which encourages faculty of all disciplines to incorporate environmental themes into their courses. How courses like "Calculus 101" or "Poets of 19th Century England" bear any direct relationship to environmentalism is a mystery. But rest assured, says Tufts Dean of Environmental Studies Anthony Cortese, all Tufts graduates will be "environmentally responsible people."

Some eco-friendly acts are case studies in good intentions missing the mark. At Brown University, members of the Brown Environmental Action Network (BEAN) persuaded the administration to produce and sell plastic mugs at university snack stands so students would use fewer paper cups. What the Beanies failed to realize is that producing plastic mugs consumes more resources, and has more environmentally damaging side effects, than producing paper cups. When presented with these facts, BEAN members were undaunted, and continued to defend the cups and their "benefit" to the environment.

These are just a few examples of eco-insanity on college campuses. But funny as they may be, environmental hysteria in the university has dangerous implications for the real world. After leaving college many student activists - eco-warriors among them - immediately gravitate to Washington, where they can pursue their ideas for forcing Americans to live up to their standards of environmental purity. The scary part is that, despite their college educations, they seem perfectly comfortable discarding scientific evidence and common sense in their crusade to "save" the Earth.

I too want clean air and water, and environmental harmony with all the furry woodland creatures. But unlike some campus environmentalists, I won't eat your trash.

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